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ABSTRACT

A study of how principals in effective schools set norms for teacher behavior, student achievement, and educational goals used data from six elementary schools in Tennessee that achieved scores on standardized reading tests substantially higher than scores predicted on the basis of the students' socioeconomic levels. Four primary norm-setting techniques were identified: the principal can act as a resource provider for teachers; can adopt a "human relations" approach, relating to teachers in ways that make them want to comply; can assert the authority of his or her position, pulling rank to obtain teacher conformity; or can model appropriate behavior consciously or unconsciously. Of these techniques, that of providing resources may have the most potential for principal effectiveness since it permits establishment of a social exchange system in which teachers can offer their compliance with norms in exchange for the resources provided. An appendix lists the nine secondary norm-setting techniques identified in the study. (PGD)

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PRINCIPAL NORM SETTING AS A COMPONENT OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS*

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INTRODUCTION

The last decade has produced much research on "effective schooling" (e.g., Edmonds, 1979; Brookover et al., 1979; Venezky and Winfield, 1979; Clark et al., 1979). One constant finding has been that there is strong administrative leadership in effective schools, and that strong administrative leadership is one of five or six key elements necessary to have effective schools (some other elements are high expectations, emphasis on basic skills, frequent testing, and a climate conducive to learning). It is one thing to identify the need for strong administrative leadership; it is quite another to identify what leaders must do and how they provide this leadership.

One way to identify components of strong administrative leadership is to examine the literature on effective schools for behavior consistently exhibited by principals. A component once identified becomes the focus in collecting data through a series of case studies. Weber (1971) described this approach as going to a few schools and observing appropriate behavior. Description provides a context enabling a meaningful interpretation of the data (Fetterman, 1982). Keedy (1982) used this approach in studying norm setting--described below.

NORM SETTING AS A COMPONENT OF PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS (1982)

Methodology

Literature review. The literature review identified norm setting as a management tool for principals in effective schools, and defined norms.

(a) Norm Setting. One component of principal behaviors in effective schools is norm setting. At least three sets of behaviors comprise norm setting:

(1) setting standards of performance for teachers (K. Clark, 1968; Wellisch et al., 1978; and Brookover et al., 1979);

(2) principals working with teachers to set high learning expectations for students (Austin, 1979; and Clark et al., 1979); and

(3) coordination and sequencing of school-wide goals and objectives (University of Indiana review, 1979; Benjamin, 1980). Ideally the third set lends specification to sets one and two: If teachers are performing and students are meeting high expectations set by principals and teachers, students should achieve the school-wide goals and objectives.

(b) Definition of norms. Norms are expressed behaviors which school personnel find valuable to conform and comply with (Homans, 1958). Behaviors include exhibited actions, and values, expectations, and attitudes of school personnel. Norms are not policy and regulations--sometimes ignored by effective principals--passed down by the central office or state department. Norms, instead, are "the way we do things around here" (Lortie, 1969) for each school--produced through principal-teacher interactions--often spontaneous and informal (Peterson, 1977). In the context of principal effectiveness, norms are what the principal requires of teachers (K. Clark, 1968) or Etzioni's "normative influence" (1961). "Principals tend to affect teachers, who affect students" (Clark et al., 1979). The literature search has identified what

principals do to set norms. Field research is necessary to identify how principals set norms.

School selection. This study addressed the norm-setting behavior of principals in effective schools identified through the Dyer model (Austin, 1979). This model defined school effectiveness by positive discrepancies--or residuals--between predicted achievement based on socioeconomic factors and actual reading scores. Schools having the greatest positive residuals, as computed by a regression formula, were chosen for this study.

This study used data from the project, Tennessee Looks at Its Schools (1981), conducted by the State Testing and Evaluation Center, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Based on Fourth Grade Stanford Achievement Tests, May, 1980, six elementary schools from Tennessee were selected for this study.

The Research Question and Analysis: How Do Principals of Effective Schools Set Norms?

Behaviors collected from principals and teachers were categorized separately into 13 ways principals set norms. For within-school analysis, any category having four or more behaviors collected from each principal was illustrated through examples drawn from the data (n=295). With teacher perceptions of principal behavior (n=151), this cutoff was three or more behaviors.

For among-schools analysis, any category used by at least four principals was considered instrumental in norm setting. The four categories were Human Relations, Resource Provider, Authority of Position, and Modeling.

Findings

Below are defined the four primary norm-setting techniques:

(a) Resource Provider

When teachers need things, the principal delivers. Resources are anything the principal can use to satisfy teacher needs: teaching materials, meeting student discipline and personal needs, protection from parents, organizational maintenance, teacher personal needs such as sick leave, etc.

(b) Human Relations

The principal relates in ways that make teachers WANT to comply: They like their principal, his attitude, and how s/he treats them. In doing this, principals set up expectations by believing and assuming the best of teachers.

(c) Authority of Position

Principal pulls rank (acts like the boss) to get teacher conformity. Teachers conform because the principal uses fear, pressure, and unilateral decision making as s/he is responsible for the school's performance.

(d) Modeling

There are two types: A conscious effort. Look I'm doing it, certainly I can expect you to do it. The second type is an unaware effort that is communicated through interactions with teachers, who then do the same thing.

The Appendix lists the nine secondary norm-setting behaviors of principals.

THE EXCHANGE SYSTEM

Introduction

Of these four techniques, Resource Provider may have the most potential for principal effectiveness. This technique relates to a concept called the exchange system: Principals--meeting teacher "intrinsic" needs as Resource Provider--ask for norm compliance in return. (Only then can teachers fulfill their psychic needs, producing the daily effort required for good teaching [Lortie, 1975].)

The potential of this technique has two sources. People in general are obligated to help those who help them (Gouldner, 1960). Two, principal preparation programs do not seem to have acknowledged this management concept. Below are implications for the exchange system and norm setting found in the Keedy Study (1982) through the literature review (sociology/anthropology and educational administration) and through field research.

The Exchange System in Sociology/Anthropology

The exchange system described below has implications for how principals set norms with teachers. Malinowski (1932:35) stated that, "the essence of the social relationship . . . is the give-and-take character of the social setting in which people are mutually dependent on one another." Malinowski, according to Gouldner (1960:170), implied that people believe:

> . . . (a) in the long run the mutual exchange of goods and services will balance out; or (b) if people do not aid those who helped them certain penalties will be imposed upon them; or (c) those whom they have helped can be expected to help them; or (d) some or all of these.

Homans (1958:606) described social behavior as exchange:

> Social behavior is an exchange of goods, material goods but also non-material ones, such as symbols of approval or prestige. Persons that give much to others try to get much from them, and persons that get much from others are under pressure to give much to them.

Gouldner (1960) believed that this exchange system, or norm of reciprocity, was a universal norm. There was a "mutually contingent exchange of benefits or contributions" (1960:170).

The Exchange System in Educational Administration Literature

In relating the exchange system described above to the school setting, the more a principal can do for teachers--as enabler--the more s/he can expect in return. Crowson and Porter-Gehrie (1981: 43) described a norm as defining a principal's obligation to teachers:

> A fundamental norm of teacher-principal interaction is that of respect for the professional autonomy of the classroom teacher. One of the principal's key roles is the protection he affords the teacher from "outside" interference and the actions he takes to "back the teacher up" in problematic situations.

Blumberg and Greenfield (1980) cite this example. The principal, Fred, believed that the majority of teachers were "wholesomely motivated and had an abiding concern for youngsters" (102). By offering himself as a primary resource for teachers, Fred could achieve his main goal: improving classroom instruction. Fred was a "broker of educational services and instructional resources . . .: 'I'll help you create new settings for yourself, if you'll tell me what your needs are'" (103). The teachers fulfilled their principal's expectation (motivation and concern for youngsters) by articulating their teaching needs. The teachers had the right to expect the principal to furnish available resources. These norms defined an exchange system between principal and teachers:

> As you fulfill their expectations, also taking into consideration your own priorities, you build one hell of an alliance with your faculty. You really get them in a corner, so that when the time comes for you to ask them to do something they would not normally do, they'll do it. (111)

Spuck (1974:18) described the exchange between resources (rewards) and teacher compliance to principal norm setting as follows:

> The formal organization may be defined as a system of consciously coordinated activities or forces of two or more persons directed toward the accomplishment of common objectives. This cooperation is not given freely by those participating in the organization, but is exchanged for desired rewards made through participation in the organization. Teachers, as members of a formal organization, exchange their cooperative behaviors for desired rewards offered by and within the school.

The Exchange System Related to Norm Setting: Field Research

The six principals participating in the study were observed meeting teacher needs more than any other activity. Many behaviors related to the teachers' need for organizational maintenance and stability. The principals were meticulous about lunch money collection, distribution of supplies, keeping the mimeograph machine in order, etc. The six schools ran smoothly. No teachers--when interviewed--complained that their school was noisy, poorly run, or chaotic.

These principals also directly met specific needs of teachers. In one school parents had to sign in and wait for their children in the school office. (Teachers had complained that parents were intruding upon their classrooms.) Another principal was an excellent fundraiser. (The money provided extra materials and equipment for teachers.) A third principal was a reading specialist who set up individualized programs for students. (Teachers could go to this principal with students having learning problems.) A fourth principal was skillful at parent-teacher-student conferences.

All six groups of teachers--when asked how their principals set norms--indicated that their principals did so much for them. Two principals explained the system as they saw it: "To the extent you provide something for teachers, they'll do something for you."

"My role is to identify teacher needs and meet them. To the extent that I can do both, I can expect teachers to comply to norms defining teaching behavior."

SUMMARY

Norm setting was identified as a component of principal effectiveness. Keedy (1982) found that principals of effective schools used Resource Provider--among three other norm setting techniques.

The exchange system--related to the technique Resource Provider--has implications for principal effectiveness. Ross (1980) concluded that research should focus on the principal's capacity to break through barriers separating teachers' sphere from administrator's sphere to influence curriculum choices in the classroom.

In this way principal behavior can be linked to student outcomes (Erickson, 1979). Two research questions might be worthy of address:

(1) How do effective principals break through teacher autonomy (Lortie, 1975) to set norms defining good teaching?

(2) What norms define this principal-teacher interaction?

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APPENDIX
SECONDARY NORM-SETTING TECHNIQUES

Appeal/Persuasion

Principal appeals to professional standards: Isn't this what a good staff should do? (Teachers comply when convinced their psychic needs will be met.) Or, principal persuades teachers that compliance is in their best interests.

Mediator/Manipulator

Principal acts as a valve or pivot to channel feedback among parents, students, central office and community; s/he knows when to pass feedback along and to whom. Principal gives teachers the impression they set norm when, in fact, the principal initiated it.

Normative Distribution of Resources

Principal takes care of teachers doing good job (defined by norms). Principal consciously or unconsciously withholds resources from teachers not conforming to norms.

Teacher as Go-Between

Principal uses a teacher to convey verbally or through modeling the former's norm-setting expectations in situations where s/he might be perceived as over-stepping his/her authority.

Teacher Decision Making/Input

The teachers, in varying degrees, help in deciding upon a norm (understood here is the maxim that teachers will tend to comply and conform to a norm they help set). The principal elicits teacher input, thereby hoping to get consensus to a norm.

Teacher Peer Pressure

Teachers know their best group interests and pressure the few non-complying teachers to conform to a norm. (The principal is aware of this process and knows when not to interfere with this process.)

Recruitment/Selection of Teachers

Despite being in a lower hierarchal position, the principal is able to gain a relatively free hand from the central office in getting good teachers. Also, the school can establish a reputation throughout the school system for having hard-working teachers; therefore, teachers transferred for perceived incompetency do not want the central office to send them to this school.

Replacement/Transfer of Teachers

Principal replaces teacher who cannot (or will not) conform to norms.

Use of Workbook Series

Workbooks provide quantitative specification of teacher performance expected by the principal, parents, and teachers. Workbooks also can clarify, sequence, and coordinate grade objectives on a school-wide basis.